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CEREBUS mothers & daughters

20



170
MAY

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

One of the most common mistakes I see in the samples that are sent to me, or which artists show me at signings and conventions involves layout and lettering. Put very simply, nothing looks more amateurish than lettering which butts up against the border of a word balloon or a caption. Usually this is a result of putting the word balloons in after the pencilling stage and the lettering after the word balloons. The lettering can't 'breathe' that way and the result is story-telling that is very hard on the eyes. It is for this reason that I recommend that everything be put on the page at the outset; you have to do very light pencil roughs of the drawings, you have to letter the dialogue and caption approximately the size that they are going to be in the finished work and you have to put in the balloons and the caption boxes making sure to leave space between the lettering and the balloons or caption boxes. The more space the better. If you rough in all of the elements at the same time, you can adjust the 'balance' with a minimum of fuss and muss. If you tight pencil a figure, labouring over it for an hour or two and then try to fit the balloons and lettering around it, it's going to look too crowded. If you do a quick stick figure and then rough in the dialogue and put a nice balloon with breathing room for the lettering and the whole thing doesn't 'fit', you can trim back on the dialogue, or change the position of the figure without having to erase a few hours work to do so. It's words and pictures *together*, folks. The words have to look as if they were meant to be there all along or they are going to look like a sloppy after-thought.

Now, as promised; whether to draw comic books or become a plumber.

To start self-publishing in this day and age you have to be prolific and you have to be able to compete with the best work out there. At the time that I started *Cerebus*, writing and drawing comic books was something that you did until you could do something else. There are still many creators who are here temporarily, until they are lured away by Hollywood or whatever else. But, face facts. Wendy Pini is not going away. Neither am I. Neither is Neil Gaiman, Eddie Campbell, Jeff Smith, Colleen Doran, Steve Bissette, Larry Marder. The greatest mistake you can make is to say that your work is better than a lot of the shit that's out there. No doubt. But being better than shit is not exactly a shining credential. Do you have anything to say? I mean, if I read one more proposal for a post-apocalyptic nightmare society ruled by remnants of a blah blah blah, I'm going to throw up. I mean, who cares? Likewise two hundred issue story-lines that consist of a handful of character sketches and a rough outline. I mean, so what? If someone comes up to me with fifty pages in photocopy form and the last page is better than the first, I tell them what Mike Kaluta told me in 1973; 'You're on the right track. Keep going.' I just got in the first issue of a comic called *Strange Attractions* (\$3.00 plus postage — Retrografix, 2130 Williams #3, Bellingham, WA 98225). I read it and enjoyed it. I could follow the story no problem and when I got to the end, I wanted to know what happens next. If the work doesn't have that effect on you, it's largely wasted effort. The work has to come first. Until you've produced a couple of hundred pages, you aren't going to know if you have the aptitude, ability or inclination to do comics for a living. The work has to come first. Once you have produced a couple of hundred pages, you have to move to the next level, doing a number of things simultaneously; producing the work, reproducing it in some fashion (photo-copies, mini-comics, booklets), circulating it and promoting it. All of those things. Simultaneously. If you produce the work but fail behind on reproducing it; if you produce and reproduce it but fail to circulate it; if you produce it, reproduce it, circulate it but fail to promote it; nothing (I repeat, *nothing*) is going to happen. Chester Brown did a number of issues of *Yummy Fur* as a mini-comic and then became too big to be confined to mini-comics. That effect will happen only if you are productive, only if you circulate your work and only if you promote it. The work has to come first. If your family comes first, or your girl-friend, or your wife or your kids or socializing or drinking or drugs, you are better off learning how to be a plumber. The work has to come first. If you have a natural talent and you produce a couple of hundred pages in the course of a year, you will get better and things will start to happen for you. If it takes you five years to produce a couple of hundred pages your improvement will be slower and you will find it almost impossible to make a living. There is nothing wrong with having any of those other things as top priorities in your life. Most people do. Almost all people do. The only way to make an impact in the comic book field is to be an exception to that rule. If there is anything you would rather do than sit down and write and draw a really good page, that thing is going to be an impediment. The world is full of distractions. Take two weeks and decide to do a page a day; pencilled, inked and lettered. If you miss a day, look at what you did instead. Whatever caused you to miss doing a page that day is an impediment to your career.

Look at the impediment.

Look at the work.

Make a choice.

NEXT: Circulating and promoting your work.

CEREBUS

NO. 170

MAY 1993

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice-President

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

**MOTHERS
&
DAUGHTERS**
a novel

BOOK ONE
(*Cerebus* 151 to
Cerebus 162)
Flight

BOOK TWO
(*Cerebus* 163 to
Cerebus 174)
Women

BOOK THREE
(*Cerebus* 175 to
Cerebus 188)

BOOK FOUR
(*Cerebus* 189 to
Cerebus 200)

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General
Steinem:
Great Cirin!

Cirin:
Dreams.
Dreams and
reality.

General
Greer:
You're awake.

Cirin:
Yes. No.
Wakefulness
is the issue.
The dreams
and reality
are merging.
The first act
of violence.
The first and
the last.
It must be.

General
Greer:
We thought
that you ...

Cirin:
Quiet. I must
say these
things. They
must be writ-
ten down.
Wakefulness.
Focus.
Division must
be resisted.
There's a
contradiction.
Extreme
focus means
that much is
lost in the
periphery.
In seeing
the overall
picture, detail
is lost. It is
summed up
in those two
things. The
dismissal of
contrary view-
points brings
division.
Is that
inevitable?
Accommo-
dation without
corruption.
The two
queens
crush the
manifestation
of the dream.
They grow
larger and
if that contin-
ues unabated,
the bishops
will prevail.
Inactivity
is their
strength.
Stasis serves
their purpose.
Awareness.
Unawareness.
Dream.
Reality.
Presented as
a problem.
Whom shall
stasis serve
when ...?



Cirin:
My arm.
What is this?
What has
happened?

General
Steinem:
Greet Cirin...

Cirin:
Quiet. Quiet.
The chariot.
The chariot a
carriage. The
Tower falls.
Motion and
discord. All
must be
calm. Stasis
can serve
us as well.
Calm and
understand-
ing; an
accommoda-
tion. Yes it is
time. It must
be time. The
Goddess
pulls aside
her mask
and has
two faces.
Heresy.
Heresy to
one or both.
The impuri-
ties can only
be that which
divides us.
What is left to
us when the
disagree-
ments are set
aside? The
Goddess
speaks of
accommoda-
tion to us
both. All else
must fall
away like a
snake shed-
ding its skin.
Calm. Stasis.
Our momen-
tum can carry
us, but we
must let the
divisiveness
fall away.
And what
aids our
cause? What
brings about
this accom-
modation?

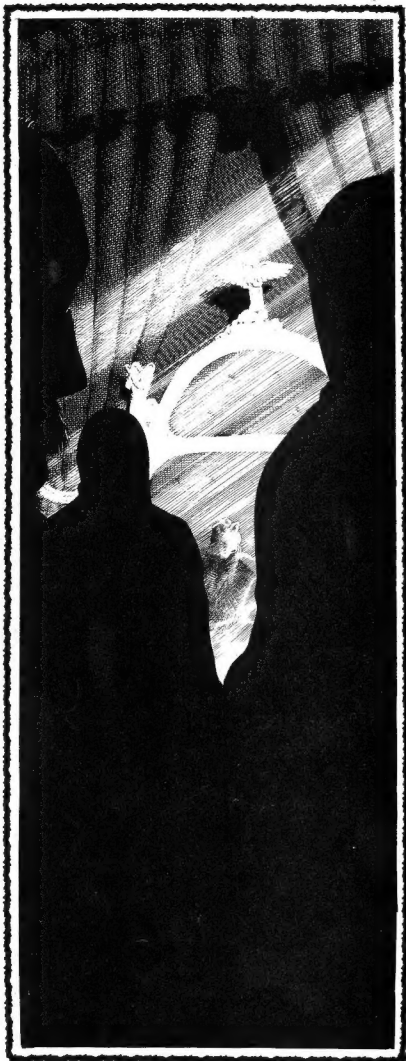
General
Greer:
Everything
is being
written
down.

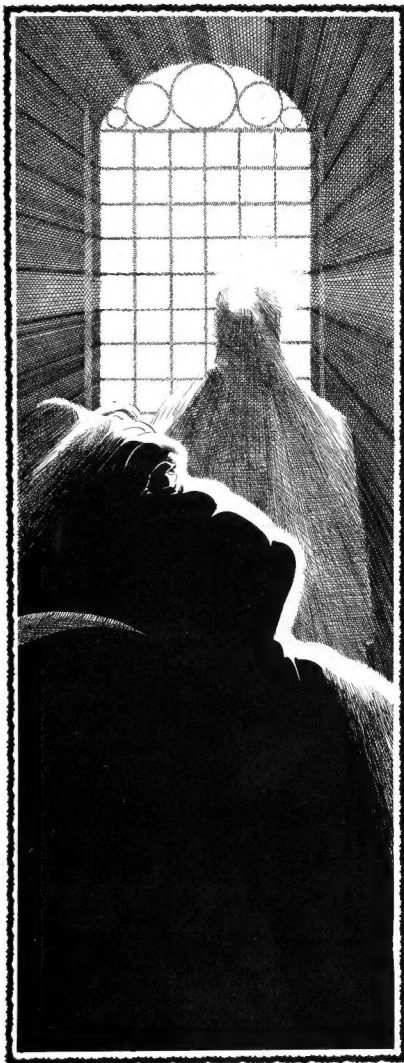
Cirin:
Yes. Yes.
You are
here as well,
aren't you.
You are my
dream and
my reality.
I could hear
you. You
have a
single voice.

The others
who are
here. No one
must speak.

No ques-
tions. A deli-
cate balance
in the border
between
wakefulness
and dream,
as fine as
the web of a
spider. The
one who just
spoke. Who
said that
everything is
being written
down. Stay.
Stay by me.
The others
must leave.

Now.
Quietly. I will
discuss all
of this with
you later.
For now the
connection
must be
maintained
and it is
fragile.
Leave me.
Leave me
now.





Cirin:

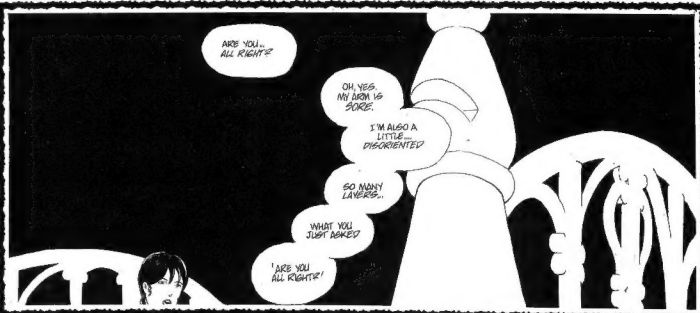
The stenographer stayed as well. That is indeed our strength. Everything is being written down. And you are calm. I can feel it. The transcriptions and how we have used them. You know, don't you? They are a strength and yet so much has been lost. I began to rely on summaries. I was eavesdropping on my own sycophants. Allowing them ... no, honesty now ... encouraging them to flatter me. How long since I have reviewed a conversation that troubled me; that raised doubt? What is between the lines; what is the subtext? What was actually being said? How tempting to request only summaries; a few paragraphs of empty flattery, idle gossip. All that would cause offense to me was excluded, stripped away and hidden from me. Like a man. Very like a man.

General Greer:
I've ...
thought that.

Cirin:
Yes, and then censored yourself out of loyalty; the implied requirement of my retreat into dreams; into reality manufactured and ... foolish. So very foolish.

It is calm, now. Can we sustain this? Our voices are like two parts of the same melody. How wonderful. Do you hear her? Do you hear her voice?





ARE YOU...
ALL RIGHT?

OH, YES.
MY ARM IS
SORRY.

I'M ALSO A
LITTLE
DISORIENTED

SO MANY
LAYERS...

WHAT YOU
JUST ASKED

'ARE YOU
ALL RIGHT?'



ARE ALL
OF US
'RIGHT'?

THE
ANSWER,
I THINK

IS
'NO'

COLLECTIVELY
SPEAKING



'ALL OF
US'
AREN'T



'UNDWELDY'
INDEED, LITTLE
BROTHER

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN
THAT IT WAS YOUR
BIG SISTER
\$LEAZE

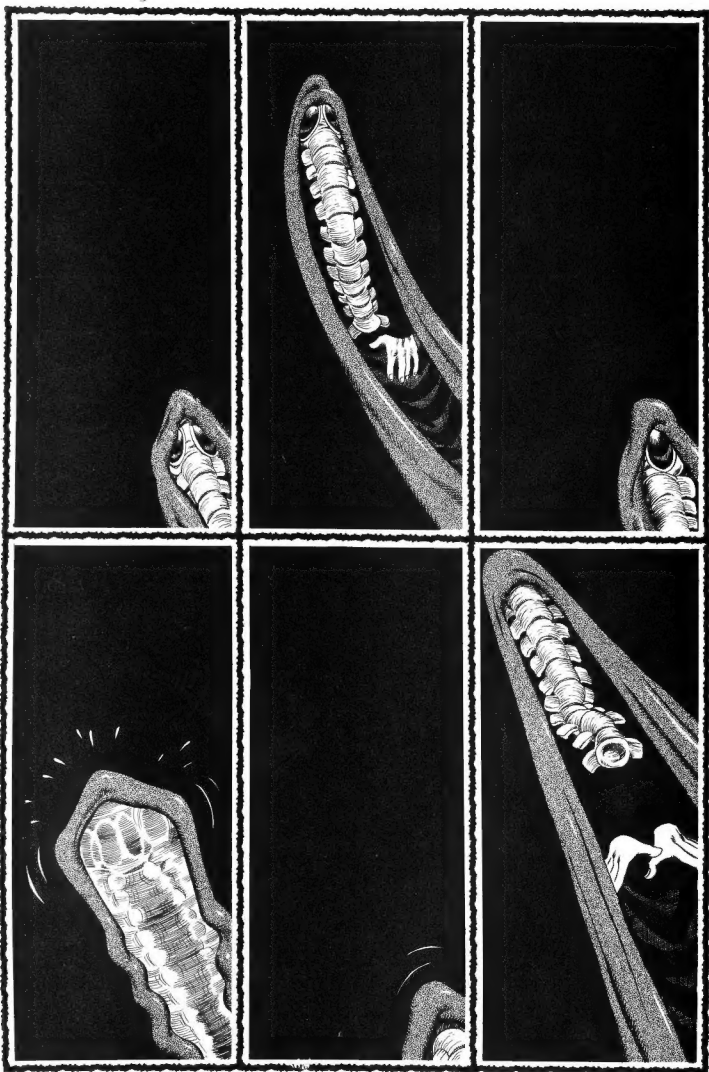
WHO SET
ALL THESE
EVENTS IN
MOTION?

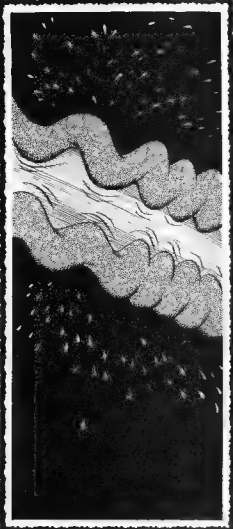
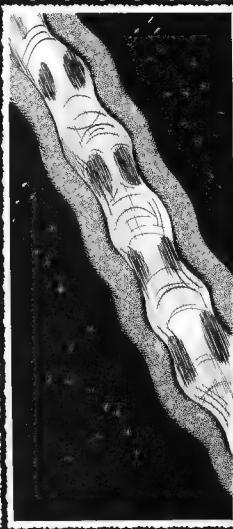
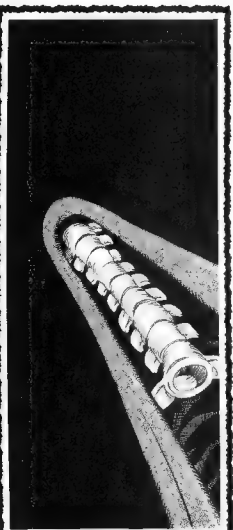
THAT WITHOUT
YOUR INEXTINGUISHABLE
LUST FOR BLOSSOM
YOU WOULD STILL
BE THE PUNISHER
BOY...

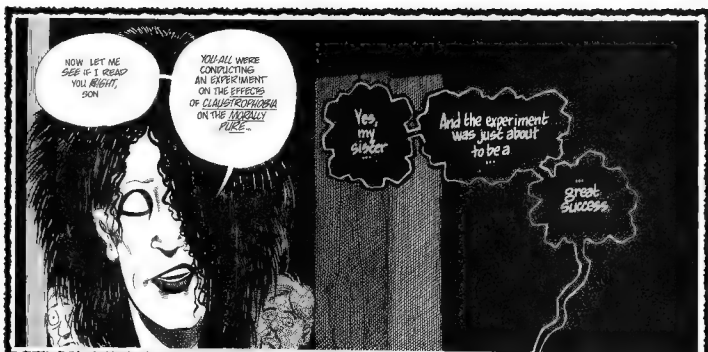
DON'T BE
SHY, LITTLE
BROTHER...

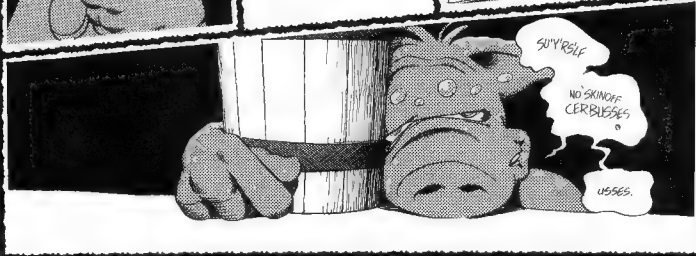
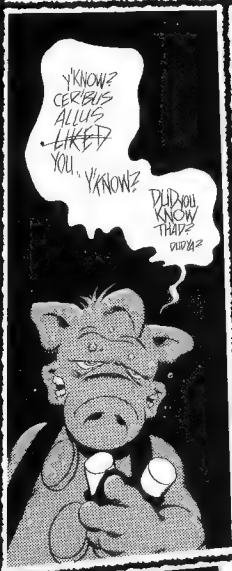
COME.

COME INTO
MY REALM...

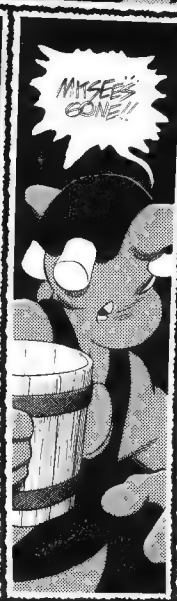
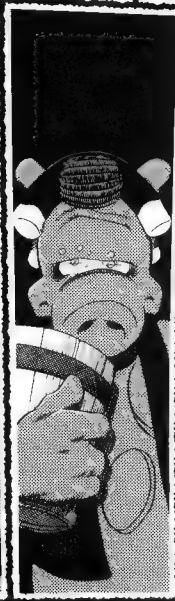
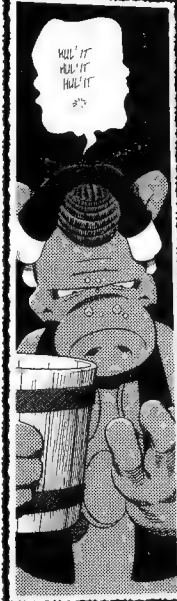


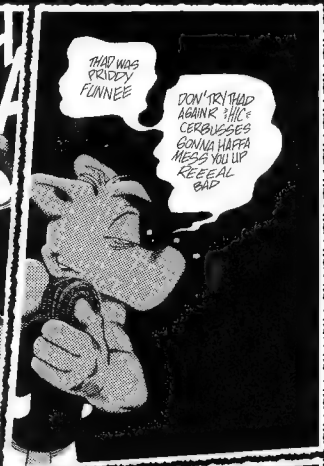
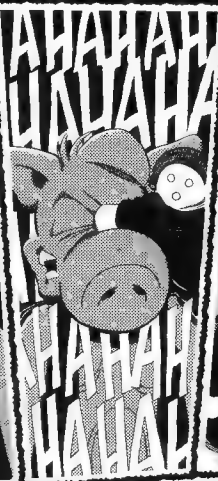
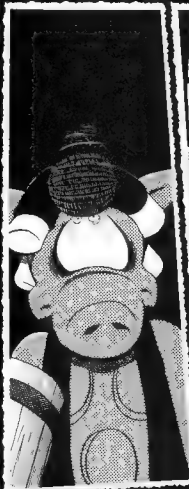












THAT WAS
PRIDDY
FUNNIE

DON'T TRY THAT
AGAINK 'HIC'
CERBUSSES
GONNA HAPPA
MESS YOU UP
KEEAL
BAD

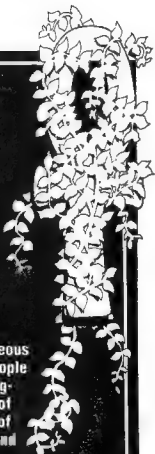


SHIN KITOON
WITHHEW IF
CERBUS FALLS
OVERN PUKES
NOW?

BE MUH
GUEST



WHOMP
HAPPA



We must be ever-vigilant against sudden and spontaneous outbreaks of sorcery. It is tempting, when events and people begin to rearrange themselves in distinct lines and configurations, to mistake such arrangements for expressions of the will of the Goddess manifesting itself. The very fact of these occurrences dictates a need for extreme caution and strict adherence to the guide-lines of our ancient and revered texts. We must never forget that the Divine Light of the Goddess's Path is often accompanied by the false light of distraction and divergence. Demons and false teachings line the True Path, ready, always, to ensnare the unwary. Birth! Birth above all else. For in childbirth even the most gullible finds the Divine Light of the Goddess to shine most brightly. With the birth of a child, the young mother finds her way in the world and the division between false mysteries and the True Path becomes as sure and as apparent as the difference between night and day. Choose an appropriate mate, choose procreation, choose the path of the True Mother and all becomes clear.

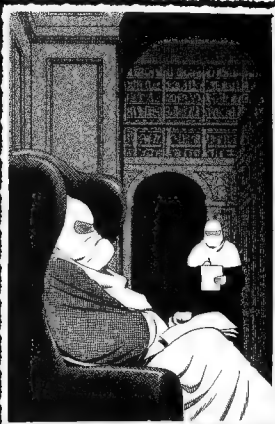
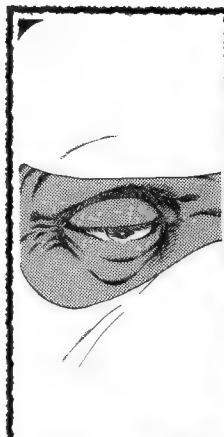
Cirin
The New Matriarchy



It is curious to me, in the writings of the Matriarchists, that they allude often to the unseen and unknowable mysteries of female existence; inexplicable and harmonious convergences and coincidences; and yet, at each juncture when they raise the issue, it is dismissed out-of-hand as wicked and false with no explanation of why, exactly, that is the case. Childbirth is the universal panacea. Have a baby and the inexplicable becomes untroublesome and irrelevant. In my efforts to raise and confront these issues, I am faced, often, by malice and indignation; most particularly when I suggest that, far from being a panacea in the area of the inexplicable, childbirth functions as a soporific; deadening natural curiosity and intellectual examination beneath layers of mindless habit, ritual and duty. The effect is not unlike military training, whose sole purpose is to transform the reasoning individual into a mindless drone.

Astoria
Kevillist Origins





Cirin:
I will make this
short and to
the point,
since many
events are
beginning to
converge and
time is of the
essence. I
have just read
the transcript
of our conver-
sation earlier;
just after I
awoke from
my coma. I
was obviously
feverish and I
habbined some
nonsense
about informa-
tion being
kept from
me; which,
of course, we
both know is
not true. It is
the very
essence of our
movement that
all information
is exchanged
freely, that it
is assessed
carefully and
its application
is measured
and just. And
yet, I see here
that you seem
to feel that
I have the
traits of a man.

General Greer:
I...

Cirin:
In my fever, I
said 'Like a
man. Very like
a man.' To
which you
replied, 'I've
thought of
that.' Do you
deny it?

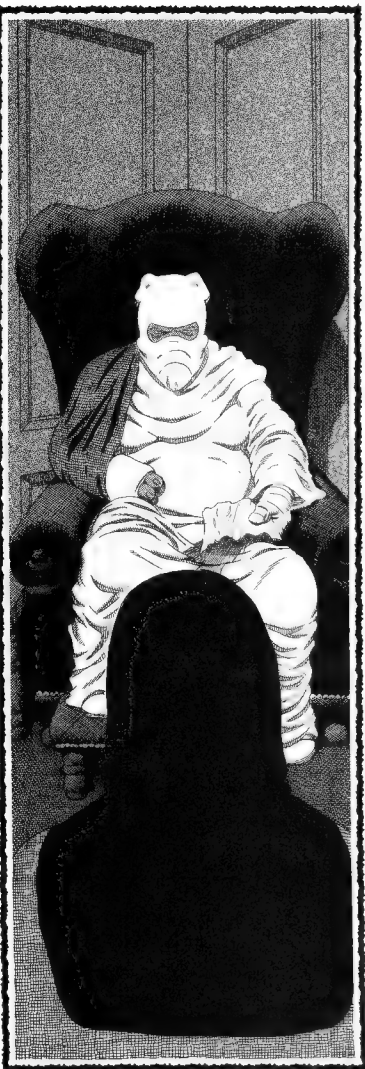
General Greer:
No, Great
Cirin. In the
context of ...
what I thought
you were ...

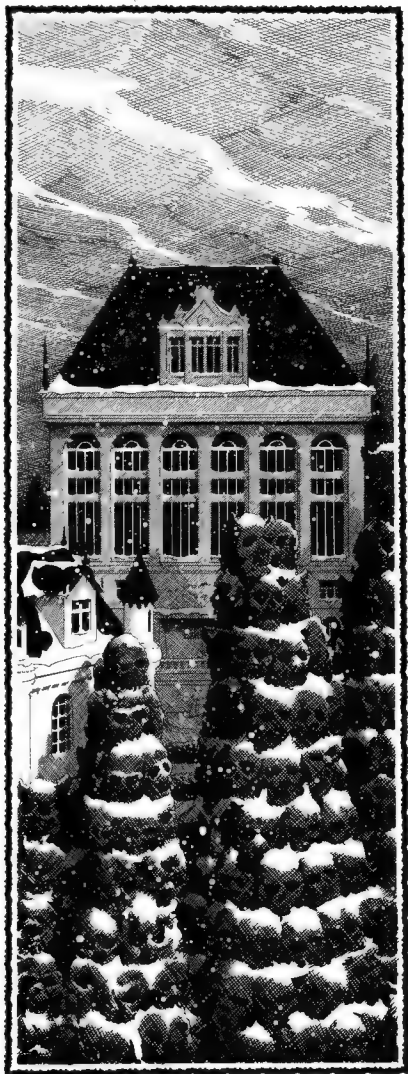
Cirin:
And do you
realize that the
expression of
such a view
represents
an extremely
serious form
of treason
against the
Goddess
herself?

General Greer:
Great Cirin,
in the context
of the conver-
sation ...

Cirin:
Just answer
the question.

General Greer:
I... yes,
Great Cirin.





Cirin:
General
Greer, you
are hereby
found guilty
of high
treason
against the
Goddess and
against the
occupational
government
of Iest. You
are to be
taken from
this place
and executed
within the
hour. May
the Goddess
have mercy
upon your
soul.

ADDRESS TO PRO CON

APRIL 1, 1993

Although the three subjects overlap, I will attempt to divide this talk into three sections; the creator and the direct market, the creator and the traditional companies and the creator and self-publishing.

The foundation upon which Cerebus is built and the reason it is a success in the direct market is a monthly frequency, a six thousand page story-line and a single title character. It makes sense to me to devote twenty-six years of my life to a single story and a single character. In the direct market your success is largely dependent on your continuing presence. Because of the direct market and its structure, this is a weekly entertainment medium. Every week, and now, twice a week, another shipment arrives in comic book stores around the world. Every week that your work is not in that shipment brings you one week closer to being forgotten. More than one creator has made the mistake of a leave of absence from the comic book field, believing that when he makes his triumphant return, he will be borne aloft on the shoulders of his adoring public, showered with fame and riches by them now that their extended wait is over. What he finds instead is indifference, mild curiosity and an uphill struggle to recover a fraction of his previous success. The same is true of the 'career move creators', flitting from character to character, project to project; a graphic novel here, a six issue run there, a mini-series, a portfolio. The difference, in his case, is that the loss of stature is more gradual. He builds his career to a peak of critical and commercial success which he then watches slip away from him.

I am not saying this is good or bad, I am telling you the nature of the direct market.

I say that in the futile and empty hope that I can spare us all another five page diatribe from Gary Groth.

The direct market is often castigated for the very reason it is so successful and secure, because it is risk free. Selling on a non-returnable basis simplifies publishing dramatically. You print what you have orders for and you get paid for every copy that you ship. Where the creative community takes umbrage is usually at the number of copies ordered. More than one ego in this room has been severely bruised by the hard truth of perceived merit which is the foundation of the direct market. Your ego tells you that your book should have shipped 500 or 600 thousand copies, but your royalty cheque tells you that it only shipped sixty thousand. It is possible to improve the perception of your merit in the direct market. *Tour 92* changed retailers' perceptions of the marketability of Cerebus, as did releasing the reprint volumes to the direct market, the announcement that I was writing *Spawn* number 10 and now, *Campaign 93*. To

change the perception of your commercial merit, you must first understand comic book stores. If comic book stores, retailers and their customers disgust you, the odds are good that you will disgust them, or even worse, make no impression on them whatsoever.

The direct market is not perfect.

At every level there are ignorant, lazy and myopic people and they are very much in the majority. There are ignorant, lazy and myopic distributors, publishers, editors, retailers, fans, collectors, investors and, yes, creators. It is a great waste of time to discuss them, and yet most of our efforts are expended in that very thing. Such and such a publisher is an idiot. So and so a distributor is a moron. Such and such a creator is a jerk. You can't change someone else, you can only change yourself. Take a good hard look at your life and your career and ask yourself where you are being ignorant, lazy and myopic.

In my view it comes down to a simple question for creators. Do you know which stores sell a hundred copies of your work? And do you know which stores sell three copies of your work? If you don't know this, you are ignorant. If you can't be bothered to find out, you are lazy. If you can't see why it's important, you are myopic.

It is very easy to be ignorant, lazy and myopic when you have a hundred people lined up for your autograph, when you are making more money than you ever thought you would, when you are besieged with offers of work from every company in existence. If you remain ignorant, lazy and myopic as the lines get shorter, as your income peaks and then begins to decline and the job offers become fewer, further apart and less lucrative, it is too late to learn, too late to take any action. When you are riding high, it is difficult to believe that 'this too shall pass', but it always has and it always will.

Image is the first sensible reaction to this basic truth of the direct market. Will *Spawn* always be the number one comic book? No. Of course not. How long will it be at or near the top? There's no way of knowing. The critical difference with *Spawn* is that Todd McFarlane recognized that he is hot NOW, while he was working on Spider-man. He recognized that he was making an enormous amount of money for Marvel Comics and that the percentage of that money that he was being paid was minuscule. He recognized that there was a window of opportunity NOW to make his future financially secure and to take control of his career. He recognized that at Marvel, his career was out of his control. A change of editor, of editorial policy, of company ownership, any number of things could throw him out in the street at a moment's notice. If Marvel could throw Chris Claremont away after fifteen years,

refusing even to let him write a farewell note on the letters page of the book he had made into the industry standard, what security is there? Todd McFarlane recognized that there is no security. There never has been and there never will be. The greatest myth to which most freelancers adhere is that there is some bank account of good-will at a company into which they are making regular deposits through loyalty and service. There is no known example of this. Termination is inevitable. It is abrupt and it is without explanation or apology. All it takes is for the company to decide that you are difficult, ungrateful or demanding and they will cast you out and replace you with any one of a thousand newcomers who are easily manipulated, obsequious and deferential. They always have and they always will.

There are several hard and universal truths about companies that you already know, but which, I think, need to be stated here. The most important is that if you sign a contract you have lost control of the work in question. I'm going to repeat that one frequently. Companies have recently begun changing their rhetoric from 'creator-owned' to 'creator-controlled' because they can sense the changes that are occurring in the field. They have changed the name, but the game is still the same. Once you have signed a contract, all of the vital decisions are theirs. They hold all the trump cards. The myth of course, is that if they violate the terms of the contract you can sue them. It is a myth because it takes a lot of money to sue an individual successfully and a ton of money to sue a company successfully and that brings me to the second hard truth about companies. No company is ever going to pay you enough money to sue them successfully. They might pay you enough to retain the services of a competent lawyer for a few weeks or a few months or a year or two, but they know you will eventually run out of money and when you do you are going to have to settle out of court. Your settlement might cover your legal expenses but this is not likely.

A lot of people in this room are currently working on material for which they have not received a contract. A lot have completed work for which they have not received a contract. There are even people in this room who have had work published for which they have not received a contract. Companies do this to limit any possibility of negotiation. By the time you get the contract, you have already done so much work and need money so badly that you will sign it whatever you might think of the terms. If you find yourself in the situation of having work printed or reprinted without a contract being signed, you could hold onto the contract when it comes, not cash the cheque and sue the company for unlawful use of your work.

I say that and it sounds plausible. In a perfect world where a system of institutionalized justice actually existed, it would be plausible.

Here's what would actually happen.

Your lawyer would phone the company's legal department and the company's lawyer would claim it was an oversight. Your lawyer would explain to you that it was an oversight and suggest that you sign the contract, endorse the cheque and save yourself a lot of needless bother. Even if he was one lawyer in a million and you insisted that you wanted to sue, and he was willing to go ahead, it would cost you a lot of money. If it actually came before a judge a year or two later after the company had thrown every conceivable road-block in your way . . . it wouldn't, but for the sake of argument, let's say it would . . . the judge would look at the piddling amount that the check was made out for, would look at whether you had a history of cashing cheques for equally minuscule amounts and he would tell you to sign the

contract and cash the cheque and stop being such a nuisance. In the eyes of the law, you would not be a prominent creative gun-for-hire who is a wronged second party in a contractual dispute, you would be an outside piece-worker with a history of selling your piece-work for nickels and dimes; an old lady stuffing envelopes out in the suburbs filing a nuisance suit against a multi-national direct mail conglomerate because she got her nose out of joint about something. All the company needs is your signature or for you to express your intention to sign a contract and begin work and absolute control is theirs. In the event of any dispute, their interpretation of the agreement is the correct one. They can afford to enforce their interpretation because they can afford to assign a lawyer to the dispute for two years, five years, ten years, however long it takes until their interpretation ultimately prevails. If their opposition is a freelance comics creator, it will take months, not years. These lawsuits have happened; the reason you don't know the injustice of the results is that each out of court settlement is accompanied by a restraining order which keeps the creator from saying anything about the settlement or the merits of the case. They know exactly how long it will take to win because they know how much money they gave you and how long it is going to last.

All right. You got a couple of anxiety pangs out of that one, but you have the answer. You just won't sue any companies. That misses my original points, so I'll return to them.

One, no company will ever pay you enough to sue them successfully and two, if you sign a contract you lose control of your work.

Let's amplify that second one there a bit, since I know you doubt me when I say that.

How much of your work is in print and available?

Ninety-nine percent of what I have created in the last fifteen years is in print and available. There hasn't been a month go by since 1979 that I haven't made money on the story in *Cerebus* #1. *Cerebus* is creator-owned, yes, but more important it is creator-controlled. The critical element of control is a work being in print and available. If it is not in print and available and you would like it to be, you do not have control over it.

If you create a graphic novel or a comic book series and you sign a contract for it and take an advance payment, you have lost control. The company you signed the contract with controls it. So long as the company wants it to be in print, it will be in print; when they decide to let it go out of print it will go out of print. There are many creative works that the stores are screaming for and which could be earning money today for their creators, but once a company decides to let a work go out of print they very seldom change their minds. You get a chunk of money up front, a few royalty checks that get smaller and smaller and that's it. Your work is out of print and unavailable. Oh sure, you can wait for the reversion clause to kick in. A year or two later, the rights have reverted to you. You can take it to another publisher, assuming you haven't sold any of the original artwork or assuming your contract specifies that you get the negatives or the printing plates, and he gives you another chunk of money, you get a handful of royalty checks that get smaller and smaller and then your work is out of print again. Meanwhile four or five years have gone by between the first and second printing and your work has been on sale and available for a total of four or five months. Companies are like sharks; they have to keep moving forward and they have to feed constantly. Given a choice between reissuing a work they sold fifty thousand copies of and got total reorders of eight thousand copies for and publishing a new work that they

can sell fifty thousand copies of, they're going to choose the latter ninety-nine times out of a hundred.

This all comes under the umbrella of what I like to call the advance game. It sounds good. Just sign here and get a cheque for eight thousand dollars. But how long does that eight thousand dollars have to last you? It has to last until you complete the work and it has to last until the royalties start coming in. If that period is eight months or a year, you have to stretch that money to cover. If it won't stretch that far, you have to go out and get another advance. It is far more the rule than the exception in the comics field that creators have all of their available working time committed for for the next year, two years, three years and have already spent most of the money that was supposed to keep them alive for that period. It is not difficult to see the end of the advance game, which is why so few people who are playing it look any further ahead than a few months or a year. You keep going until you drop dead of exhaustion and all you have to show for it is whatever is left of your last advance payment and your last batch of royalties. And a body of work that is out of print and unavailable.

These are inescapable truths. If you ignore them, you are trading the peak years of your creativity for a hand-to-mouth existence. I can't put it any plainer than I already have. If you sign a contract you have lost control of your work. No company will ever pay you enough to sue them successfully. A company's interpretation of a contract is the accurate one because they can afford the legal muscle to enforce their interpretation.

Another hard truth is that companies mutate. Don't forget that. If you sign with a company because you have a good relationship with an editor or publisher and that editor or publisher is fired or quits, your contract is with the company; not their employees. When they quit or are fired you have to deal with their successors who might not like you and might not like your work. Your work will go out of print faster, changed in ways you didn't want it changed. Remember, the company decides what your contract says and what effort they exert on your behalf and you have no control over whatever they decide to do. You can sign on with a small company with a handful of prestigious titles. They admire your work and fall all over themselves to get you to sign with them. They can't do enough for you and you're one of their biggest stars. Then they start growing, expanding. They decide to do a line of work-made-for-hire super-hero titles drawn by naive twenty year olds for nickels and dimes and which earn them twenty times what your book does and suddenly you can't get anyone above the rank of production assistant to return your calls. What are you going to do? Sue them? How? And for what? Companies get sold and companies get taken over. You might have a clause in your contract that says it is not transferable, that it can't be sold. Under business law a take-over doesn't constitute a transfer. Your work is still in the belly of the same fish, it's just that that fish just got eaten by a bigger fish. A bigger fish that might decide that the merchandising clause in your contract includes film rights. What are you going to do? Sue them? Bigger fish have more and better lawyers and deeper pockets (to mix a metaphor). Then there's bankruptcy. Chapter eleven protects the company from its creditors, but it puts your contract on the auction block if a bankruptcy court decides that it is a company asset. Then the bankruptcy arm of an accounting firm gets to decide who they sell your work to and for how much. You can file an appeal, but you're going to need a very good, very expensive lawyer to see it through and that is going to cost you a lot of money; five figures and maybe more and it's a seventy-five twenty-five odds against you that a judge is going to find in your favour

over the interests of a large company. Fifty or sixty thousand dollars to get back a creative work that has been out of print for years and which earned you maybe five or ten thousand dollars when it first came out.

These are not hypothetical examples. Each of these situations has happened to creator-owned properties, because they were creator-owned but at the exact moment a contract was signed they were no longer creator-controlled in any meaningful sense of the term.

I know all of your objections to self-publishing. Believe me, I've heard every one of them a hundred times. I'm not here to talk to you into self-publishing, I'm not here to defend it and I'm not here to hold your hand and show you how to do it. As I tell unpublished cartoonists, if you really want to self-publish, nothing can stop you. If you don't really want to self-publish no one can help you.

Grown-up obligations are the biggest impediment. If you have a wife and children, a car and mortgage payments you are, quite naturally, going to be wary of leaving the advance game, however much of a dead end it is. You have to bring in x number of dollars a month to keep your head above water and you do not have any money left in your budget for paying a printing bill. Self-publishing represents the same kind of long-term investment in your future that your mortgage represents and you would do well to consider it in the same way. To move away from the imprisonment of the advance game and into the security and freedom of self-publishing, you are going to have to move one step at a time. You have to divide your work week, basically, into work that you do to stay alive and work that you do that you own and control and which will provide you with a secure living somewhere in the future. Treat it the same way you do a mortgage. At first your week is devoted mostly to paying interest with a little bit off of the principal. Gradually you shift the emphasis. Start off with a few hours a week on your self-publishing project and work to the point where you can spend a full day every week on it; then two days; then three days. Select the projects you work on through a company with an eye to those projects which will take the least time and produce the largest revenues. *Lobo versus Terminator versus Batman versus Robo-Cop versus Aliens versus X-Force* would be a good bet. Hold your nose and write the damn thing. When the royalties start coming in, you might be able to work on your creator-controlled project for three days a week instead of one. Working on a small project you care about personally at a company combines that worst of both worlds. It is sure to go out of print in a hurry, it produces very little money and because you care about it, it is going to take way too much time to do. The capricious changes and petty politics attached to any project that you care about done for a company is going to cause you more aggravation in a month than you will get self-publishing in a year.

If I were to tell you how to self-publish, step-by-step and were I to leave nothing out, this one hour talk would turn into a barrage of information; a distillation of all I have learned from my failures and my successes in the direct market over the last fifteen years. It would be dry, it would be technical and it would go right through you like shit through a goose. Mm. Sounds complicated you would say to yourself in your best Homer Simpson voice. The companies rely on that. Sounds complicated. We have a temporary secretary who comes in two days week who does for us everything that your publisher does for you. Publishing in the direct market is so complicated, most weeks she goes home by mid-afternoon on her

second day and we sure as hell don't pay her ninety per cent of the profits on the book. One of the strongest objections to self-publishing comes from creators who say they just want to write and draw and get someone else to handle the business side. This sounds very simple and straightforward, but in actual fact it is impossible. If you are earning your livelihood writing and or drawing comic books you are in the business and, whether you like it or not, the business is going to permeate every aspect of your professional life. By handing control of the business side of your career to someone else, all that you accomplish is to make yourself a victim of their business decisions and choices; most of which amount to little more than a whim. How much of your time is spent on the phone arguing with someone at the company? How much of your time is spent fixing something that you don't think is broken? How much of your time is spent leaving phone messages that don't get returned? How often are you blamed for something that is the company's fault? How often are you told that you're late, when you're on schedule? How often are you told that you were not told something that you were, in fact, told? How often are you told that that thing you were told was a mistake and you shouldn't have been told that?

As a self-publisher I don't argue with people on the phone. If I need something done, I phone the person who is best equipped to do it and then they do it. That's what they get paid for. If they do a bad job, we look around until we find someone who can do the job properly. At first, you have to do most of the work yourself certainly. But, if you can stick to a schedule and hit a circulation of ten or fifteen thousand copies, you will have enough money to pay a part-time employee to do everything that needs to be done. Whatever goes wrong, you can fix it. And once it is fixed it stays fixed for years. That isn't the case then you're dealing with a company. Whatever it is you fix this week, you're going to have to fix something else next week and you're always going to have to fix it the way the company wants it fixed, no matter how long it takes, how stupid you think it is or whether or not you thought it was broken in the first place.

Gary Groth, as part of our recent exchange of unpleasanties, quoted from Ivan Boesky's address to the University of California's commencement ceremony in May of 1986 where Boesky informed his audience that 'greed is all right, by the way. I want you to know that. I think greed is healthy. You can be greedy and still feel good about yourself'. It is remarkable to me that Gary would bring this up because Boesky's empire had a good deal more in common with comic book companies than it did with self-publishing. All companies are pyramid schemes pure and simple. The people at the bottom of the pyramid, the creators, labour on behalf of the people at the top, the publishers. Money, like hot air, rises. A dozen or two dozen name creators account for seventy-five per cent of the one hundred million dollars generated in the direct market every year. And yet, their percentage of the profits is the same as a rookie just entering the advance game for the first time. Excuse me, but who, exactly, is being greedy here? Without the creators, that wealth does not exist. Just because I'm not giving ninety per cent of the money generated by my creativity to a corporation, I'm being greedy? Is that the idea? I don't consider self-publishing greed, I consider it common sense. With a little effort, any creator can learn to do what a publisher does. No publisher could ever learn to do what a creator does in a million years. That's why contracts exist. Without contracts publishers have nothing. Without contracts, creators have everything. 1986 represented nearly unimaginable growth in the direct market;

growth that came down to three names; Frank Miller, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons. *Dark Knight* and *Watchmen*. Without Frank Miller's two covers for a work-made-for-hire super-hero line that is coming out this summer, the line consists of a hodge-podge of second stringers, editors masquerading as writers, also-rans and wannabes; and so Frank Miller's name comes first in all of the publicity. Without Matt Wagner, Neil Gaiman and Grant Morrison, DC's Vertigo line is Joe Orlando's 1970's mystery books with their underwear showing. Without Barry Windsor-Smith, Valiant is an over-hyped and not terribly funny joke. Can you not grasp this simple fact of existence? I look at the direction the field has been going and the answer is no, you can't. At every turn, they make it obvious that you are completely expendable to them; they make it obvious that you have to play the game their way, or they're going to take their ball and go home. And still you give them ninety percent of your money to do basic high-school bookkeeping and secretarial chores, to lie to you, to cause you grief and, ultimately, to throw you away.

And so, I'm not going to give you a detailed and comprehensive description of self-publishing. When Mike Friedrich first contacted me to appear here, I declined. As I told him, I don't think you are ready mentally or any other way, to self-publish. I am in constant communication with most people who are breaking away from the advance game and moving into self-publishing. I decided if I was going to come here and talk to you, I was not going to make it easy for you to ignore what I have to say and file me away under 'interesting marginal viewpoints'. I decided the best approach was to give you three very simple steps, and a possible fourth, that would start you on the way to self-publishing; three steps to help you take your career out of the hands of bean counters and bottom liners, sharks and scam artists who run the companies. But mostly, I thought it was important to show you the situation in which you find yourselves and how completely the deck is stacked against you. Having done that, here is my best advice.

A convention like WonderCon is a good place to start changing your ignorance into knowledge. Put very simply, most of you have your view of the industry upside-down. You see fans and retailers as parasites and companies as patrons. Fans and retailers are your patrons and the companies are the parasites. If you do want to self-publish and you are not the biggest name in the field . . . or even if you are the biggest name in the field . . . you are going to need to know who the biggest backers of your book are going to be. Start a mailing list. You don't have to make a commitment; tell your fans while you're autographing your company-controlled work that you are thinking about self-publishing and ask if they would like to be on a list for information. If twenty of the hundred people waiting in line agree to give you their name and address, that's a very good beginning for one convention. If only three out of a hundred give you their name and address, that should tell you something about the nature of your popularity how much of it is yours and how much of it is the company's. It is even more important to make contact with retailers who are fans and supporters of your work. They are autonomous businessmen who own their own businesses. They are not Diamond or Capital franchise stores. They call the shots and if they decide their store is going to have a big push for your self-published work, all of their employees, a disproportionate amount of their budget and a majority of their customers will be on your team at kick-off time. *Campaign 93* has as its core list of stores every store that I did a signing at on *Tour 92* as well as every store owner who gave me a business card at my warehouse and trade show appear-

ances. New stores are signing on at a rate of three or four per day in the month since issue 167 shipped containing the details. I am making the list available to other self-publishers who express an interest and they are adding their own list of stores to it.

Of course for most of you, all of this is a good two or three years in the future, even as a possibility. Let's get back to your three or four hours a week that you're able to set aside for your self-published project.

While you are beginning to develop your idea, doing the groundwork for it, I would suggest that you start with a print. Not a sixteen colour five by six foot item on two hundred pound glossy stock. A black and white print on inexpensive paper. Think movie poster, but smaller. A single illustration or design with a slogan that expresses what it is that your self-published project is about. Something that will grab everyone's attention and spark everyone's interest. No one had ever heard of Kevin Eastman or Pete Laird, but the very name *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* went through the direct market like a forest fire out of control. Within a couple of weeks, everyone had heard the name and everyone was grabbing a copy when they saw it. It is a creative challenge. It is very easy to sit back and scoff at advertising. Virtually all of it is deplorably bad, to be sure. But have you ever tried to come up with something that works? A black and white print that you can get done at Kinko's for twenty-five or thirty cents each. Sign and number them. Take them with you to conventions. When people ask you what they are, tell them that it's a self-published project that you are developing and the print is step one. Sell them for ten, fifteen, twenty dollars and make sure your fans know that the money is going towards your first printing or your first issue. Keep that money separate from your advance game money and start building a war chest. When you find retailers who are big supporters of your work, sell them the prints at a discount for quantity. Two hundred prints at twenty dollars each is four thousand dollars and that's the cost of a printing bill.

As a means of starting this is not terribly difficult. A few hours a week, starting a mailing list and producing a print that you sign and number. To self-publish successfully, you have to realize what your assets are and make use of them. A comics creators assets are the recognition factor attached to his name, his reputation as the creator of quality work, his talent and his autograph. That is what you own. That is yours and no one else's. Never underestimate your autograph. It's no big deal to you and after three days of signing comic books it is unrecognizable. With me the vowels are the first to go. DvSm. DvSm. But make no mistake, in the context of the direct market it is genuine currency and you are the mint. If you are attempting to raise enough money to self-publish, always keep your autograph at the front of your thoughts.

The next stage after a signed and numbered print can be your first issue or first printing. But there is an intermediary phase that is gaining a great deal of popularity and attracting a great deal of controversy; the ash-can. An ash-can is a quick printed digest version of a creative work. It is printed on 8-1/2 X 11 sheets, four pages to a sheet, folded and stapled. Ash-cans are then signed and numbered by the creator and sold, most often, to a single retailer or group of retailers at a fixed price. Let's say four dollars. A signed and numbered run of two thousand ash-cans will therefore produce eight thousand dollars, which is around the cost of two printing bills, assuming you do a black and white comic book on newsprint with colour covers and keep the page count to twenty-four or thirty-two pages. The ash-can is popular because it can provide a lump sum to the interested self-publisher. It is controversial because its distribution is controlled by a

single retailer or group of retailers. My personal view is that an ash-can is a good way to start self-publishing and for that reason I approve of them. If a creator does an ash-can just to line his own pockets, at that point I disapprove of them. Bear in mind that your autograph is currency for you and stock for everyone else. You might get four dollars per ash-can and the retailer might agree to sell them for eight, but the person he sells them to is under no such constraint and it is not unusual to find ash-cans trading in a very short time for very large amounts of money. You have to decide for yourself if the end justifies the means.

At this point, I would like to discuss collaboration in self-publishing. Obviously what I have outlined so far is tailored to a great extent to the writer-artist as individual, not the writer-artist team. There are perils involved in joint self-publishing and those perils must be addressed at the outset if they are to be avoided. Let's say that a writer wants to self-publish. He's going to need an artist or, if he does an anthology he's going to need a number of artists. The easiest mistake to make is to drag contracts into it. Remember, contracts are what you are trying to get away from for all the reasons I just outlined. Let me give you a couple of examples.

When Kevin Eastman approached me to do a cross-over with the Turtles, I agreed providing that there was no contract involved. Kevin wrote and drew the story, I put Cerebus in all the right places and re-wrote his dialogue and lettered it. I got paid the agreed-upon fifty per cent of the profits which came out to a little over twenty thousand dollars for three days' work. Mirage then signed with First Comics to reprint the Turtles in colour. They wanted me to sign the contract and I declined, reminding Kevin that our original agreement called for no written contract. I *did* insist that First Comics send me a letter laying no claim to Cerebus, which they did. Because of my reluctance to accept royalties from First, a work-made-for-hire company, Kevin suggested that we just let the story go out of print at that point. I agreed, since much of the work being done at Mirage was work-made-for-hire, which made me very uncomfortable. Just before Christmas of last year I got a work-made-for-hire contract in the mail which stated that I had done work on Turtles number eight as a Mirage employee and that all contents were their sole property with the exception of Cerebus. I declined to sign the contract and wrote back to the bureaucrat involved outlining the terms under which the story had been produced and the standing agreement that the story was to be out-of-print. I said that Kevin had my number and if he had changed his mind, I would be happy to discuss it with him. Naturally I have heard nothing since that time.

Now let's compare that with the situation at Aardvark Vanaheim. I am the sole owner of the company and Cerebus is copy-righting and trademarked in my name. But, of course, I have a collaborator in the form of Gerhard, whose contribution to the success of the book is, to say the least, very substantial. Gerhard is not contractually bound to me or to Aardvark Vanaheim. Our agreement is that half of the company's assets are his. He is free to leave at any time and he is free to take half of the bank account with him if he goes. He is free to withdraw half of the money in the company bank accounts at any point without explanation. And he is also entitled to reprint any issue of Cerebus that he has worked on and is entitled to half of any of the revenues produced by the reprinting of those issues he has worked on for as long as they are in print from Aardvark-Vanaheim.

You should have seen the stir that caused at the Northampton Summit.

Since that time, I have extended this understanding even further. If Gerhard decides to leave, he is fully entitled to publish his own Cerebus comic book with collaborators or a collaborator of his choice who would be entitled to draw the characters, write the stories and letter the dialogue. I don't think, or at least I flatter myself, that the stories would be as good, and the characters would certainly be handled a lot differently, but I can guarantee that Gerhard's Cerebus comic would have a lot better backgrounds than mine.

It is the only practical basis for a collaboration. Each party must be free to own and control his own work. If this understanding had existed at the time of the Cerebus/Turtles cross-over, it would mean that I would be able to reprint the story if I chose and compensate Kevin Eastman in the same proportion that had governed the original printing. Of course Mirage is now just another company, with many lawyers and deep pockets, so it is too late to deal with the issue creator-to-creator. Which is a shame. I think.

So that returns us to a writer who wishes to self-publish. Since he is starting with nothing and intends to build something one step at a time, what he is going to have to find is an artist who is like-minded; who wants out of the advance game and is willing to devote a portion of his work week to developing a project which both will own and control. It is not difficult to envisage creative differences arising, so I think it must be decided at the outset what the conditions of separation are going to be; a kind of verbal pre-nuptial agreement, if you will. Two courses are the most obvious. One, that both parties agree that the creative work ceases to exist if they don't want to work together any more. Two, that both parties agree to having control and ownership of the work after a split. In this, I am reminded of Freff and Foglio's *D'arc Tangent* where severe creative differences arose after the first issue and an acrimonious split was the result. Had they decided in advance that they both had control and ownership of the joint work, it might be possible that they could then have each continued the title, interpreting it their own way and working with new collaborators. Provisions would have to be made for the ugly world outside of self-publishing. What if one creator was offered a movie option for his version or a merchandising agreement? I think it is better to keep self-publishing within self-publishing. Any outside agreement is a contract and I've outlined all of my reservations about that. It could be decided that after a split, control and ownership be limited on both parts to self-publishing in the direct market, or it could specify equal compensation on any outside agreement no matter how far off in the future. In an artist writer collaboration, that would mean the writer could continue to use the character designs and visual style and the artist could continue to use the place names, character names and story-line. In this circumstance it is not likely that one or the other will get ripped off or feel that he has been. To a lesser extent, the same thing would apply to an anthology format. I think a writer would be more apt to attract better artists to help him in starting up a self-published anthology if they were given ownership of the stories that they worked on and were able to publish those stories themselves in their own self-published titles when the time came. Since cell division is the very basis of life, I don't think creators should be as frightened of it as they are. Even assuming Freff and Foglio couldn't get along with *anyone* and that each new collaboration split up after the first issue, the very worst you end up with is forty different versions of *D'arc Tangent*, all going off in wildly different directions. You could limit that in advance, saying that only the original creators have control and ownership, but essentially that

is going to make each successive collaboration a work-made-for-hire situation with the original creator now serving as a company and his new collaborators as outside piece workers.

These are large issues in the direct market, in self-publishing and in creator control. They are seldom-discussed but no less important for that. If anything, the lack of comprehensive discussion makes them more important. The original structure of Image is a good one; Seven creators with full ownership and control of their characters. If four of them vote in favour, another creator is added to the Image roster with full ownership and control of his character and title and the authority to put a little 'i' logo on the cover. Within that structure it is not a company, it is a collective, a union of comics creators in a way but with a major difference. Instead of negotiating with management, they have changed the role of business from management to administration. Instead of seeking more favourable terms from the business side of comics, they employ the business side as salaried workers under their control. The pyramid is still there, but now the creator is at the apex and the business entities are under his jurisdiction. Problems are beginning to arise now. Some of the creators are succumbing to the temptation to become companies in their own right, releasing books which are copyrighted and trademarked in their name which they pay other people to write and draw. Even if it is an enormous page rate, it is still work-made-for-hire. Even if it is an enormous advance and enormous royalties, it is still the advance game. I wrote issue 10 of *Spawn* in the same spirit and under the same conditions that I worked on *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* number 8; as a gesture of solidarity with creators who had chosen to take control and ownership of their characters into their own hands. I would assume that if I asked Todd to send me films of *Spawn* 10 because I wanted to release it as a Cerebus one-shot in a year or two years' time, that Todd would be amenable to the idea. I used the *Spawn* logo on the cover of *Cerebus Number Zero* and I didn't phone Todd to ask his permission. If, in time, as Mirage Publishing has done, I were to get a work-made-for-hire contract in the mail or a legal notice ordering me to remove the *Spawn* logo from the cover of *Cerebus Zero*, I would have no regret whatsoever about my original decision. When a creator takes his career into his own hands and is able to achieve autonomy in the business decisions governing his creative work, I will lend whatever support I can. If that creator moves from a position of autonomy over his own creative work and begins employing other creators under the terms of work-made-for-hire or the advance game, I withdraw my support. They are not breaking any laws in doing so, and their actions are in the best traditions of free-market capitalism, but in my view, they are wrong. No ifs ands or buts about it. Ownership and control of creative work by the creator who created it, or who assisted in its creation are, to me, absolutes. You can't hedge on it, modify it, chip away at it or rationalise it by the fact that there are a thousand people willing to go along with it. Work-made-for-hire and the advance game are exploitation, pure and simple. Ownership and control which do not constitute true ownership and control are just words. Empty rhetoric. You can forgive, or at least understand a company which takes control and ownership away; without exploitation, the companies do not exist. For a creator to impose an exploitive system on another creator is to prove ourselves no better, and in actual fact, much much worse than the companies themselves, particularly in light of the fact that a creator who imposes the exploitive system of work-made-for-hire or the advance game on a fellow creator is doing so from a position of

economic strength, security and well-being. I feel the only sensible reaction to this condition is to isolate those creators from our community. Not attack them. Isolate them. As I said before, the issue is not a legal one, it is an issue of morality. The best you can do is attempt to educate young writers and artists to the implications of work-made-for-hire and the advance game. It is difficult, to be sure. Someone who is working behind the counter at Macdonald's who is suddenly offered seventy-five or a hundred dollars a page to pencil stories which are trademarked and copyrighted in another creator's name is going to jump at the chance, virtually without exception. Many years ago, it made as much sense for Len Wein to write *X-men* 94 as it did to do anything else. It would take a genius to be able to see anything wrong with Steve Gerber and Val Mayerik putting a wise-cracking, cigar-chomping duck into a few panels of a *Man-Thing* story. And that's the tragedy of the creator's situation over the last six decades in the comic field. Fair market value at the time is wildly different from fair market value ten, twenty or thirty years down the road. This cannot be changed, since the principal governing it has its basis in English Common Law which is almost a thousand years old. A fair price agreed on by two consenting parties.

As I said before you can understand companies playing the game, for without the game they don't exist. And you can understand creators playing the game when alternatives do not exist. In an age when you could work for Marvel or DC, but not both, all you could do was to sit out in the suburbs, stuffing your envelopes and hope the company was making enough money off of your efforts to stay in business and to keep sending you your paycheck. But in an age when it is not only possible to create comic books, to publish and distribute them yourself with the assistance of a rock-solid and flourishing network of distributors and retailers, in an age like that it boggles my mind that creators continue to compound the injustices of the past; either by working on characters whose creators have been victims of the system, or by working for creators who impose those same exploitive terms. Understand that I am not saying they are bad people. Kevin Eastman is a friend of mine, I have friends at each of the comic book companies in existence. Many of my friends earn their daily bread off of characters created by Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko. But that's personal. I like them as people, but I know that professionally, they are the enemies of everything I stand for and everything that I believe in and most of my time that is not spent writing and drawing and promoting Cerebus is spent in fighting them and the system that they keep alive and reinforce by their participation in it; because their participation and their rationalisation of that participation whatever that rationalisation is just compounds the injustices that have been done to Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Jerry Seigel, Joe Shuster, Steve Gerber, Len Wein, Chris Claremont . . . I mean, the list goes on and on doesn't it?

I can certainly tell you that the happiest days of my life are the days when someone goes 'over the wall'. The day that Image left Malibu; the day Steve Bissette decided that his royalties from 1963 were going to finance his long-delayed start in self-publishing, the day Colleen Doran decided that her goal was to do *A Distant Soil* exclusively and that any work she did for any company was just a means to that end. And most particularly the day when Alan Moore said to me, after leaving DC for the last time:

'When you find out you've been standing in shit, you don't jump up and down on it to punish it; you walk away.'

As I said at the outset of this section, I don't think you're ready to self-publish and for that reason I had

decided not to come here. Now that I am here, I would like to conclude this talk with a few suggestions about Pro Con. If you are able to make a go of it and assuming there is another one next year and the year after that, I think it would be very wise and in your collective best interests to bar publishers and their representatives from attending; or at the very least that a substantial portion of the time available be given over to a creator-only gathering. In the event that there is a joint occupation question as in the case of Dick Giordano, Paul Levitz or myself, I feel that the sanction should be maintained. So long as possible future employers are in the room, no meaningful discussion is likely, or, I think, possible. A panel of publishers with microphones addressing a room full of creators and fielding questions is a good microcosm of how the field itself is structured, and consequently can only reinforce the current system as constituted. At the Northampton Summit, we had a number of creators arrive unannounced and my first instinct was that the gathering was going to turn into a cacophonous free-for-all. What we found, instead, very much to our surprise was that creators are so used to listening to rhetoric and being interrupted and suppressed from a very early age, that they don't do that to each other in the context of a general discussion. As long as someone had something to contribute, he was allowed as much time as he wanted to state his views. Any time one of us ran out of things to say, started repeating ourselves, or retreated to stating the obvious, someone else would step in and get us back to the subject at hand. To be successful, a meeting of that kind has to be completely unstructured. It requires only an exchange of proposed agendas ahead of time. In the case of the Northampton Summit, Scott McCloud arriving with copies of the Creators' Bill of Rights in raw form superseded and, in fact, already distilled most of the groundwork that the original participants at the Toronto Summit had in place. Since I had originated the process in an attempt to get support for my right to sell the Cerebus volumes by direct mail without soliciting the distributors, it became a simple matter of my fighting for a clause giving creators the right to choose the means of distribution of a creative work. My original proposal was the right to control the means of distribution, but the right to choose was far more sensible and far less adversarial so I was happy to compromise on the point. I think seating should always be in a 'theater in the round' format. It means no one occupies a more important or central position than anyone else. My suggestion to Kevin and Peter as hosts of the Summit in Northampton was a variation on the tribal totem. An object of any kind; a lighter or a coin. So long as one of the participants held the totem, he was free to speak without interruption, surrendering the totem when he was done to another participant. That ended up not being necessary. Since you will be meeting in greater numbers, it is very possible that you will find it necessary. In any event, I can't urge you strongly enough to abandon the classroom format. Sitting and fidgeting in a chair while listening to wind-bags like myself is what made school something we all couldn't wait to get away from and a lot of the reason we started writing and drawing in the first place.

I'd like to thank Peter David, Mike Friedrich and Bryan Uhlenbrock for inviting me here today, I'd like to thank all of you for your patience and your attention. Now, I'm going out to the lobby for a cigarette. If anyone cares to join me to discuss self-publishing further, I'd be very glad of the company. For the rest of you; he's come de publishers.

Thank you.



"I
think
Cerebus
is a poor
example
of a
'marginal'
title."

Dear Mr. Sim:

I guess I'll give you the benefit of the doubt on the "feel free to contact me at the above number" closing on the *Campaign '93* cover letter, but I must confess that I felt a bit snubbed when I tried to call today. I don't have a fax machine, but I'm blowing \$5.00 to fax this to you.

First, with respect to *Campaign '93*. I think one of the most productive use of resources would be to target *Sandman* readers. My plan is to produce a one-pager which will be inserted with every issue of *Sandman* #50. In it I draw on the similarities between *Sandman* and *Cerebus*, and offer a free copy of *Cerebus Bi-Weekly* or \$1.25 off any back issue. I'll let you know how it works.

Second, an idea relative to the "direct link" between retailers and publishers. Like your "golf clubs" commentary, before a retailer can push for a title, he (or she) must at least see a copy of it. It is obviously outside the resources of any small publisher to provide free copies to all retailers, but I also think it unfair for the retailer to assume the entire cost (and risk) of purchasing sample copies.

What I propose is that, through the existing distribution network, publishers offer sample copies of their titles (limit one per retail account) at a net cost near the publisher's production cost. For example, a new title "KITCHENER TIMES #1" is solicited with a cover price of \$2.50. As part of the same solicitation any retail account could order a single copy at a net cost of say 60 cents. The same approach could be used with a book which is sitting unsold at the publisher. (Let's say Jo Duffy has 500 copies of *Nestrobbler* #1 sitting around. Wouldn't she like to get these into the hands of retailers and get back some of the production costs?)

I think this will accomplish three things:

- It minimizes the cost to the retailer of trying new titles without costing the publisher a lot of money.
- It allows publishers to stand out from the crowd to say "Hey, C'mon, just try one copy."
- It will make experimentation more attractive to small stores. (Anytime something is limited to "one per account" small stores get excited.)

Now I realize that this isn't going to make more money for the publisher right away, but the biggest problem small publishers have is market penetration. You see, I think *Cerebus* is a poor example of a "marginal" title. I believe your market penetration is very high (in Athens there are four stores and all of us carry *Cerebus*.) More importantly, you have a large number of fans who are also store owners and managers. *Campaign '93* would be an exercise in futility if this were not the case.

On to the "real" marginal titles (e.g., *Bone*, *Hepcats*, *Distant Soil*). Despite many articles and previews in *Cerebus* most retailers don't know these titles from Adam. (Just because a store carries *Cerebus* doesn't mean that the owner/manager reads it.) Besides, at the risk of triggering a psychotic episode, we really need to see the "product." I recently picked up a copy of *Hepcats* in another store's three-for-a-dollar bin, liked it, and will likely start ordering it (especially the first trade paperback.) Had I not been able to actually hold and see a copy, I don't think I'd be doing this.

To be honest, I think there's a strange animosity between small stores and small publishers. You have expressed dismay that non-fan retailers wouldn't notice if *Cerebus* ceased publication. Well, would you notice if a store which sold five or fewer *Cerebus* went under? I often get the feeling that most small publishers only care about the handful of stores that can order large quantities. (I recently spoke to Brian Hibbs and he felt that he had reached the upper limit of *Cerebus* sales at about 50-60. I only sell 5, but since I sell about 35 *Sandman*, I may be able to get that number up to 10 or 15. In any case, in my store *Cerebus* already outsells plenty of Marvel and DC titles.) Yes, survival may depend on a few dozen stores, but the potential for growth depends on finding more stores to carry the titles (even if they can only order a few.)

So back to the "Retailer Review Copy Program" (to coin a term). Obviously, it makes no sense for me to propose it since it must come from the publishers. If you think it has merit, we need to get at least a few publishers willing to try it out. (Likely some of the usual suspects, Martin Wagner, Jo Duffy, Colleen Doran, and Jeff Smith. I'll obviously need your help since they likely won't take my calls either.) The idea could then be presented to Bill Schanes at Diamond (and whomever is appropriate at the other distributors.) Diamond could do a write-up on it in *Dialog* (and, maybe, even call attention to the review copies offered in each edition of *Previews*.) I'd certainly push it in my *Comics Retailer* column and I'd expect Hibbs to do the same.

So, does this idea have any merit?

Sincerely,

Preston A. Sweet, Owner
Main Street Comics

2351 College Station Rd., #447, Athens, Georgia USA 30605

As I explained to Preston when I called him back, I prefer that all communications on Campaign '93 be in print form (either fax or mail). Too many good ideas don't get the proper attention they deserve because they are exchanged over the phone. If I have the idea on paper, I can give it my full attention and circulate it to everyone else in the 'network'. I think Preston's two ideas have a great deal of merit, and I'm happy to present them here.

CEREBUS CAMPAIGN '93 — SANDMAN #50 PROMOTION

As a SANDMAN reader you appreciate the qualities which make this title special. First, it bears the mark of a single creative force, Neil Gaiman, who has now completed 50 monthly issues. Second, most stories are presented in novels, as rich and complex as any text novel. Third, for those of us who didn't start with the first issue, these novels are collected into affordable trade paperbacks. SANDMAN, however, is not the first comic book to have these qualities. That honor belongs to CEREBUS.

CEREBUS is the first, and thus far only, true epic presented in the comic form. In 1977 Dave Sim began CEREBUS seemingly as a parody of Conan the Barbarian as done by Barry Windsor-Smith. Since then it has evolved into an impressive commentary on love, politics, religion, philosophy, and life in general. CEREBUS is a 300-issue (and 27-year) limited series which has almost flawlessly kept a monthly schedule for over 160 issues.

CEREBUS, the title character, is a sword-for-hire whose primary motivation is to accumulate wealth. (Once asked how much gold he wanted, he responded "All of it.") Unfortunately, fate has prevented him from living a simple life. He is constantly used by others who see him as a means to their own ends. These include Lord Julius (a manipulative politician who bears no small resemblance to Groucho Marx), and Astoria (intelligent, strong-willed, a fierce champion of change, who also happens to be Julius' ex-wife). Thus far CEREBUS has found himself elected Prime Minister of the city-state of Iest, then deposed by the church, then reappointed Prime Minister (in a compromise between the church and the state), then (amazingly) elevated to Pope. (While Pope he informs his followers that the only way to heaven is to personally give him all of their gold. Thus, while never totally in control, neither is CEREBUS ever totally controlled.)

CEREBUS also includes a rich assortment of supporting characters. Jaka, a tavern dancer (and Lord Julius' niece) is his true love, though fate has never allowed them a moment's peace together. Artemis (aka "The Roach" among others) is a somewhat insane fellow who constantly takes on personalities related to comic book characters. He has been the "Moonroach", "Wolveroach", "Punisheroach", and, most recently, "Swoon" (based on SANDMAN).

Obviously, I'm a big fan of both SANDMAN and CEREBUS, and I'd like you to be one too. Not primarily to make more money, but to help promote one of the best comics currently produced. For this reason I'm offering you a FREE copy of CEREBUS bi-weekly (or \$1.25 off any CEREBUS back issue.) While issues of CEREBUS are usually part of large novels, CEREBUS bi-weekly reprints the early issues, most of which are self-contained stories. Then watch for CEREBUS to appear in SPAWN #10 (written by Dave Sim), and, in June, watch for CEREBUS #0 which will reprint FOUR issues for only \$2.25. Thank you for your interest and please let me know what you think.

Preston A. Sweet, owner, main street comics

ONE FREE CEREBUS BI-WEEKLY
(or \$1.25 off any CEREBUS back issue)
(Limit one per person — While Supplies Last)

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I wanted to clear up a few discrepancies from the ad that appeared in the latest Cerebus. The Cerebus Comicstore Display Stand can be made in white, black, or grey with the trim in black or unfinished/primed for paint. The basic panels have a melamine (plastic) coating. This may sound more appealing to a retailer than a fully painted piece. If you could, would you list my new address and # —

1089 Taft Street
Rockville, MD
USA 20850
Telephone (301) 294-2181

I have received one inquiry from Tim's Cards & Comics in Lancaster, PA. If you have any interested parties send me their names and addresses. Thank You.

Sincerely,

Jerry Nelson

P.S. Love the new Elrod.



"My plan
is to
produce a
one-pager
which will
be inserted
with every
issue of
Sandman #50"

AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Dear Dave,

I am interested in making contributions to the Comic Book Legal Defence Fund, and, in fact, have already done so — in the amount of \$25.00 US per month for the last four months. What I'm interested in finding out is: Is there still a Canadian defence fund, anymore? I remember that the Comic Legends Fund was based in Toronto; does that still exist?

Please let me know if there is any Canadian fund. I have enclosed a SASE for your reply. Thanks.

Sincerely,

Edward Wilson
301C-815-8th St. E.
Saskatoon, SK
S7H 0R6

Contributions to the Comic Legends Legal Defense Fund can be made by sending a cheque or money order to Comic Legends Legal Defense Fund, 5334 Yonge Street, Suite 120, Willowdale, Ontario M2N 6H2. Attention: Paul Stockton.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Looking at the Cinnists attitudes to men, the way they reverse the roles by creating an army of women and keeping the men under foot, are they showing the men how the women have been treated in the past? Wouldn't they therefore make some of the men, as they forbid Jaka to, dance? Forcing the men to dance, in front of a crowd of jeering women.

And I feel that it would be vital to the plot to have Bear and Damien do it

Naked.

Purely because it fits in with the story mind you.

Really.

Hell, I'd buy a few more copies.

I'd have to. One might wear out.

Abe Karma
128, Foxhill Road
Forest Fields
Nottingham
England

I mentioned the idea to Bear and he thought that it was (whattayacallit) 'gross'.

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Some quotes you might enjoy from the book *History of the Mongols* (based on Eastern and Western Accounts of the 13th and 14th Centuries), by Bertold Spuler, translated by Helga and Stuart Drummond. This is a collection of first-hand accounts describing travels to and meetings with the Mongolians during the time of the Great Khans.

(1) "The Mongols claim to be the true masters of the earth. God created the earth merely for their sake so that they should exercise their rule and enjoy it . . . Once when a European came to one of the Great Khans and was asked 'What presents have you brought me?' he replied: 'I have not brought a present since I did not know your power.' The prince replied to that: 'Did not the birds of the air tell you about it when you entered my country?' To this he replied: 'It may well be that they said something, but I did not understand their language.' At this the prince was mollified and spared him." —Ugo Monneret de Villard.

(2) "When there is no war raging against the enemy, there shall be hunting; the young shall be taught how to kill wild animals, so that they become accustomed to fighting, and acquire strength and endurance, and will subsequently fight, without sparing themselves, against the enemy as though against wild animals." —a law proclaimed by Chingiz Khan.

(3) "How do you think you know whom God will absolve and in

whose favor he will exercise his mercy? How do you think you know that you dare to express such an opinion? Through the power of God, all empires from sunrise to sunset have been given to us, and we own them . . . You personally, at the head of the kings, you shall come, one and all, to pay homage to me, and to serve me. Then we shall take note of your submission." —from the reply of the Great Khan Goyuk to Pope Innocent IV.

And my favorite (4) "The Muslims swore on the Koran, the Mongols on gold." —Rashid ad-Din.

It's enough to make me wonder if our general perception of the Mongol hordes is wrong. Perhaps they did not have a yellowish complexion, straight black hair, and slanted eyes, but instead stood about three feet tall, had large snouts, and grayish fur that stank when wet.

Take Care,

Eric Schaller
1047 Sherman Ave.
Madison, WI
USA 53703

Wouldn't you have loved to be a fly on the wall when Pope Innocent IV got a load of that snappy little rejoinder?

★★★★★★★★

Dave—

Not feeling too wordy today. Normally I'd give ya the spiel about what an oasis of inspiration your work is to me, but I've written you a couple of those already. Refer back if you're in need of much-deserved strokes.

Basically I just want the honor of presenting to you a complimentary copy of my band *Zircus's* debut single. The A side, *My Astoria* draws heavily on Cerebus for lyrical imagery which is why we incorporated some of your artwork into the cover (after acquiring your permission, of course). Our sax player and artistic director, Chris, and I went through my *Cerebi*, mixing and matching possible combinations of Sim work until, to the great benefit of us all, Chris rejected all my ideas and designed the cover you now possess. Needless to say, I'm quite proud of the music (which is, to the best of my ability, an aural portrait of tribute to your style) and, proud of having written the first (??) (or the only . . . are there any others??) song about Cerebus. I

Last night, as I slept, a freshly invalid Aaron Burr dragged himself to the chair in my room and leaned his wizened frame against my drafting table. As he poured out three fingers of whiskey from a bottle he'd brought, he began to explain in hushed tones why it was Alexander Hamilton on the ten dollar bill instead of himself.

"It was the duel, of course," he said, between gulps. "I hit the bastard through the liver to the spine, and yet he took a day and a half to finally expire. His every waking moment was filled with laments to his attendants, hypocritically claiming he bore me no ill will."

He paused a bit, and I moved to speak but could not, as I was dreaming.

"If he had lived," Burr said, "he would have continued his decline. As it is, I made Hamilton a giant by killing him."

Here is my version of the events which provoked Nicole's licentious diatribe:

My attempt at a witty and clever note in #165 was certainly not meant to be offensive; in fact, the tone was meant to be playful and evocative. But, as Adam Beechen has recently pointed out to me, finely-honed sarcasm is hard to pull off in cold, harsh print. Kids, don't try this at home.

There are a few misapprehensions contained in Nicole's bitter abuse, however, that beg to be corrected:

1. Nicole told me Rob was offended. I've known Rob for 12 years. I love him like he was a member of my family. Rob has not told me he was offended. End of story.
2. Nicole said she was offended. Exasperated, I said, "Fuck you if you can't take a joke." OK, it's not that gentlemanly, but there you go. If you're gonna quote, Nicole, quote accurately.
3. I'll cop to calling her psycho. But what do you call it when someone screams at you unprovoked for twenty minutes? Emotionally unbalanced? You say tomato, I say psycho.
4. What's Pat Donley got to do with it? Got to do with it? What's Pat Donley but a second hand emotion?

Well, like the Image boys and Peter David, like John Byrne and Mike Barr, I've told my side and that's the end of it. Besides, I think it should be clear to all why I think Rob broke up with Nicole. She has

cannily displayed the reason far better than I could have ever hoped to have put it.

Aardvark Comment. Soap opera hi-jinks and Scholastic Aptitude Test vocabulary...

Me?

I'm going back to attempting more witty and clever notes to you, Dave. Anything more on this is shooting fish in a barrel.

Later,

Larry Young
1578 Fell Street #4
San Francisco, CA
USA 94117

I talked briefly with Larry at Brian Hibbs' Comix Experience party at Wondercon and ran into Nicole on the last day of the Con where she showed me a nice assortment of correspondence from male *Cerebus* fans bending over backwards to appear normal (no easy task). Much to my dismay, both Larry and Nicole seemed very well-adjusted and charming.

★★★★★★★★

Dave,

After reading #167 I noted with alarm that your intended '93 stop at UKCAC was now 'tentative'. I believe that I speak on behalf of your many thousand UK readers when I say that it would be a great privilege, nay boon, if you could get over here for a visit. I mean, we need you man. The country is going down the tubes and a visit from you and Ger is just the kind of Economic stimulus/royal reconciliation / Government policy rejection/moral value instilling/terrorist defeating type event that Britain needs. Remember what your visit did for us in the Eighties? Come back Dave, we love you.

Cheers,

Nick Gibbons
Pendle College
Lancaster University
Bailrigg
Lancs.

LA1 4YU England

P.S. The little guy's doing great.

I got faxes the same day from Forbidden Planet and my old pal Frank Plowright at UKCAC expressing interest. The Tour will be coordinated by those good lads at Fantastic Store in Nottingham, so I'll keep you posted. As for a royal reconciliation, if Fergie or Di shows up at one of the signings, I'm hitting on them and the hell with the monarchy.

Dave,

Hope all goes well.

I am writing in response to the letter from Kurt Busiek that you printed and responded to in *Cerebus* #168, in which Mr. Busiek comments on the chances of getting re-orders on self-published titles like *Cerebus*, *Nestrobber*, and *A Distant Soil*.

Since we could not determine which comic store Mr. Busiek is talking about (other than it might be in the Portland or Seattle area), we haven't been able to ascertain why that retail outlet hasn't received the re-orders he indicated.

However — to the best of our knowledge — Diamond is currently the only comic distributor willing to process a purchase order for any re-order, with the only restriction being the quantity limits set by the publishers. (Some publishers only take orders in quantities of 5, 25, 50, etc.) In the case of the titles Mr. Busiek mentions — *Nestrobber* by Blue Sky Blue and *A Distant Soil* by Aria Press (as well as your own titles) — there are no publisher limitations.

Consequently, we have placed numerous purchase orders for as little as 1 copy of these and many other titles. This certainly isn't cost effective for us, given the labor and time involved in taking orders from each retailer, generating purchase orders, then receiving and invoicing the individual store orders once they arrive at a specific Distribution Center.

In the case of *Cerebus*, over 80 purchase orders for re-orders on various issues have been generated since January—ranging from 1 copy to over 60. With all those orders, it seems odd that you "have yet to speak to any retailer who has been able to get an issue of *Cerebus* on re-order," as you stated in your response to Mr. Busiek's letter. (As for Mr. Busiek's search, Diamond has also processed over a dozen purchase orders for both *A Distant Soil* and *Nestrobber*—with a good portion going to either the Seattle or Portland Distribution Center.)

Also, with almost all of the titles we offer — including *Cerebus* — we order a percentage above the total quantity we have sold on initial orders to provide a surplus for re-orders at each Distribution Center. This allows for immediate reorder supply on the vast number of comic titles that we offer every month, without having to place

another order with the publisher. Again, there is some expense in ordering these additional copies, since there is always the risk that there won't be demand for them.

In either case, if a retailer places a re-order, and the books are available from the publisher, Diamond is willing to process the order, regardless of the costs. It is this dedication to service that has made us the number one comic distributor, and it is also our way of helping the industry we love continue to prosper.

Roger Fletcher
Diamond Comic Distributors, Inc.
1718-G Belmont Avenue
Baltimore, Maryland
USA 21207

★★★★★★★★

Dear Mr. Sim (or Dave, if you prefer):

In issue #168 you responded to a letter from Kurt Busiek by saying that you "have yet to speak to any retailer who has been able to get an issue of *Cerebus* on re-order." To demonstrate that some progress is being made, I've enclosed two of my re-order invoices. The first (1/13/93) shows a back-order for issues 162, 163 and 165. The second (1/27/93) shows delivery of 163 and 165. (#162 remains something of a "holy grail.")

So far this year I've also been able to get re-orders on titles such as *Madman Adventures* and *Paul the Samurai*, neither of which would be considered "hot". This is an obvious improvement over the past when it was rare to get re-orders on any title which wasn't sitting in the local warehouse. Therefore, I'd suggest that my fellow retailers who have given up in the past renew their efforts.

Also in #168, Travis Sumner wrote on wanting to buy "cheap" issues of *Cerebus* to hand out to his friends. For those who can find them, back issues of *Cerebus Biweekly* fill this bill nicely. Not only can they (hopefully) be obtained cheaply (less than \$2 each) but almost all of the stories are self-contained. My favorites are the first issue, the *Song of Red Sophia*, and *The Secret* (which introduces Jaka).

Along these lines a crazy idea: would you have any objection to a store stripping down a copy of the first phone book into individual stories and stapling them between covers which advertise both the

store and *Cerebus*? (In fact, the flyers for *Campaign '93* would fill this job nicely.)

A final comment on Sumner's letter. He says that his store owner orders one (and only one) copy of *Cerebus* (meaning that it never gets shelf space). In my store whenever someone asks me to special order a title I'll usually order one extra for the rack. At worst (since I get most titles at 50% off) I'll break even. At best, this customer will find a new reader for his or her favorite title and a new customer for me.

Best always . . .

Sincerely,

Preston A. Sweet, Owner
Main Street Comics
2351 College Station Road
Suite 447
Athens, Georgia
USA 30605

The re-order system is improving. One of the biggest problems is that many of the re-orders are only partly filled, based on availability. I've just sent Carol and Gerhard into a tizzy digging up all of our paperwork which pertains here. We have a current inventory of 486 copies of *Cerebus* 162. Interestingly enough, we had no inventory of *Cerebus* 163 in January. We had total re-orders of ten copies for *Cerebus* 162 for January of this year. From this, I surmise that Preston's re-order for 162, 163 and 165 were a) filled from existing inventory or b) were filled from re-orders which didn't cover the re-orders on hand (i.e. Diamond ordered ten copies of *Cerebus* 162, filled a certain number of re-orders and then had none left when it came time to fill Preston's order). Technically, in this case, Diamond could say that they filled re-orders on 162, because, in fact, they did. It would not be true to say that they filled all re-orders on *Cerebus* 162, because we still have almost five hundred on hand and Preston still hasn't been able to get them. A great deal hinges on the estimated need for re-order stock. Most of this is done by computer programs at the distribution headquarters. It tells the distributors what to order based on previous orders and re-orders. On 163 and 165, someone was obviously guessing a little higher on the inventory. For 162, they guessed wrong, at least to the degree of ten copies being insufficient additional supply. On the computer, nothing would be amiss; initial orders were filled, inventory was depleted, re-stock was ordered,

disseminated and paid for. God's in his heaven and all is right with the world. Except Preston still wants copies of 162 and we have five hundred of them. I would appreciate further comments from Roger or anyone else in the distribution end. We can't solve these problems without everyone's participation and I appreciate very much Roger (and John Davis of Capital) taking such an active interest in our dinky little end of the industry.

And we are, slowly and painfully, getting together a full inventory list so stores and individuals who can't find what they're looking for can get them directly from us. Right now, Ger and Carol are wrestling with our own Computer From Hell.

DAVE SIM PERSONAL APPEARANCES 1993

MAY 30 TORONTO
Mega-Con

JUNE 5-8 ATLANTA
Diamond Seminar

JUNE 10 DECATUR
The Comic Company

JUNE 11-13
CHARLOTTE, NC
Heroes Con.

JULY 2-4 CHICAGO
Comicon

JULY 31
WINDHAM, MAINE
Casablanca Comics

AUGUST 19-22
SAN DIEGO
Comicon

SEPTEMBER
UK TOUR '93

Confirmed:
Fantastic Store, Nottingham

Chris' New Store (formerly Timeslip)
Newcastle

AKA Books, Glasgow

NOVEMBER 13, 14
MANSFIELD, OHIO
Mid-Ohio Con.

CEREBUS ALBERTA BOUND

MINI-
TOUR
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(WESTVIEW PLAZA)

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APR 18 • WARP ONE COMICS & GAMES

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LIMITED QUANTITIES ARE AVAILABLE of the ALBERTA-BOUND MINI-TOUR POSTER pictured above. 11 X 17 full colour; \$6.00 each (price includes postage and handling).
Order from Words & Pictures, 2500 University Dr., NW, Suite 110, McEwan Hall, Calgary, Alberta T2N 1N4 • Another Dimension, 324-10th St. NW, Calgary, Alberta T2N 1J8 •
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Also inquire about CEREBUS CAMPAIGN '93 T-shirts with the TOUR dates on the back. Thanks guys, especially Mike Moynihan and Todd Ayotte for performance above and beyond.